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The Estonian SSR in 1944-1945

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OLAF MERTELSMANN & AIGI RAHI-TAMM

CLEANSING AND COMPROMISE

The Estonian SSR in 1944-1945¹

When the Red Army liberated or re-conquered Soviet territory from the German forces during World War II, it had to tackle the problem of what to do with a population that might have cooperated or collaborated with the enemy. Special concern had to be given to the newly acquired territories, occupied and annexed by the USSR in 1939-1940 as a result of the Soviet-German treaty of non-aggression and its secret protocols. Stalin was able to conquer a territory inhabited by approximately 23 million people stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Three independent states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, lost sovereignty and became Soviet republics. Eastern Poland and Romanian territory were annexed as well. One year of Soviet rule in the Baltic republics and two in Eastern Poland had turned the majority of the population in the western borderlands against the new regime, and the invading German forces, sometimes helped by local anti-Soviet partisans, the ‘forest brethren’, were mostly greeted as liberators in the summer of 1941. Troops mobilised in the newly acquired territories and those already existing there initially proved unreliable. As a result of mass desertion,² most soldiers from the western borderlands were transferred to labour battalions, where they served during the first months of the war mostly under awful conditions. All this, of course, was noted by Moscow and in the Soviet rear preparations for later recovery of the lost territories started early.

1. This paper was written in the framework of the project “Estonia in the Cold War” (SF0180050s09).

2. Approximately 2,000 Estonians deserted at the beginning of the war. Alexander Statiev, *Social Conflict and Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands, 1944-1950* (PhD-thesis, University of Calgary, 2004), 37.

Our paper deals with the concrete example of the Estonian SSR (ESSR) and the postwar cleansing that took place there.³ The country, with 1.1 million inhabitants and approximately the size of the Netherlands, gained sovereignty from Russia as a result of a war of independence in 1918-1920 fought in the context of the Russian Civil War. The young democracy was among the many states establishing statehood after the breakdown of the Russian, German and Austrian-Hungarian empires in Central and Eastern Europe. Severing economic ties with the former centre proved particularly difficult.⁴ Nevertheless, the process of state building succeeded. A land reform dividing up the large estates improved the fate of the peasants and created tens of thousands middle-sized farms. The urban population benefited from new education and career opportunities. During two decades of independence, Estonian high culture⁵ and Estonian language instruction developed at all levels of the educational system. More social equality than under the old tsarist regime, rising living standards, the improvement of living conditions and a clear trend toward catching-up with Western Europe made the interwar statehood a success story in general, but the Great Depression hit Estonia and took a heavy toll. In the early 1930s, a right-wing movement, the Estonian Veterans' League, gained an increasing number of supporters.⁶ The year 1934 marked the breakdown of democracy, and one of the founding fathers of the republic, Konstantin Päts, established authoritarian rule after a coup d'état. However, as he was one of the less repressive leaders of the region, the

3. For an historic overview see: Romuald Misiunas, Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990* (London: Hurst, 1993); Jüri Ant, *Eesti 1939-1941: rahvast, valitsemisest, saatusest* [Estonia 1939-1941: about the People, the Governing and the Fate] (Tallinn: Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus, 1999); Anu Mai Kõll, ed., *The Baltic Countries under Occupation: Soviet and Nazi Rule 1939-1991* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003); Olaf Mertelsmann, ed., *The Sovietization of the Baltic States, 1940-1956* (Tartu: Kleio, 2003); O. Mertelsmann, ed., *Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt bis zu Stalins Tod. Estland 1939-1953* (Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 2005); Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg, eds., *Eesti ajalugu VI: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni* [Estonian History VI: From the War of Independence until the Regaining of Independence] (Tartu, 2005); Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, Indrek Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity* (Tallinn, 2006); O. Mertelsmann, *Der stalinistische Umbau in Estland: Von der Markt- zur Kommandowirtschaft* (Hamburg Kovač, 2006); David Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum: Die Sowjetisierung des estnischen Dorfes 1944-1953* (Cologne-Weimar-Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); Tõnu Tannberg, ed., *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940-1953: Sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis* [The Estonian SSR 1940-1953: Mechanisms of Sovietisation and their Legacy in the Context of Developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe] (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007); Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml' 1940-1953* [Pribaltika and the Kremlin 1940-1953] (M.: ROSSPEN, 2008); Tõnu Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy v respublikakh Baltii v poslevoennye gody (1944-1956): Issledovaniia i dokumenty* [The Politics of Moscow in the Baltic Republics in the Postwar Years (1944-1956): Research and Documents] (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2008).

4. Jaak Valge, *Breaking away from Russia: Economic Stabilization in Estonia 1918-1924* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2006).

5. As a late-coming peasant nation, Estonians did not possess a real high culture under the tsars. This was developed during the period of independence.

6. Andres Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000).

foundations of civil society eroded anyway. Still, the regime somehow benefited from improving of international economic conditions, and the second half of the 1930s saw rising standards of living again.

In September 1939, after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the USSR threatened the Baltic States with an ultimatum and pressed for the stationing of Soviet troops, which the Baltic leaders granted. The Soviets promised not to interfere in internal affairs, but broke regulations by using their Baltic airports for air attack on Finland during the Winter War. In the shadow of Hitler's campaign in the West in June 1940, a second ultimatum pushed for an increase in the number of stationed troops and the establishment of new, Soviet-friendly governments in the Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania agreed under severe pressure and the threat of war. Stalin's special emissary in Tallinn, Andrei Zhdanov, supervised the first steps of Sovietisation and hand-selected the members of the new government. After mock elections and the puppet parliament's application for incorporation into the Soviet Union, Stalin 'allowed' the Baltic States to become Soviet republics in August 1940.⁷

The first year of Soviet rule in 1940-1941 brought the restructuring of the existing state apparatus, the first waves of arrests of real and potential opponents to the new regime, a step-by-step Sovietisation process and a severe decline in the standard of living due to gradual transition to command economy and economic exploitation. A first wave of mass deportation on 14 June 1941 shocked the population and put an end to last illusions about the new regime. After the beginning of operation 'Barbarossa', a second wave of terror hit the country. Prisoners were tortured and killed and destruction battalions ran wild in the countryside while the German troops were advancing.⁸ Local units of 'forest brethren', anti-Soviet partisans, supported the German move forward and liberated some regions on their own. The Soviets were able to mobilise approximately 35,000 soldiers and to evacuate, partly by force, 25,000 people. According to an order by Lev Mekhlis, head of the political administration of the Red Army and deputy people's commissar of Defence, Estonian soldiers were sent to labour battalions.⁹ The survivors would serve in the Red Army. Mobilized soldiers as well as evacuees in the Soviet hinterland could later be used as a base for recruitment for the preparations of recovering Estonia.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the USSR's two policy approaches to the recaptured Estonian SSR in 1944-1945: cleansing and compromise. The literature

7. For a new account of the events based on archival research see Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*..., 44-101.

8. More than 2,000 victims of destruction battalions and the killing of prisoners have been identified today, Meelis Maripuu, Argo Kuusik, "Political Arrests and Court Cases from August 1940 to September 1941," in Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 327. On destruction battalions see Indrek Paavle, Peeter Kaasik, "Destruction Battalions in Estonia," *ibid.*, 469-487.

9. Peeter Kaasik, "Formation of the Estonian Rifle Corps in 1941-1942," in Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 886.

on the subject stresses, with good reason, the aspects of purges and repression;¹⁰ however, the possibility of a policy of compromise is usually not well represented. To understand the immediate postwar period one has to take both aspects into consideration. The scale of repression is often exaggerated in literature. Historians in exile estimate the number of people deported from and killed in Estonia in 1944–1945 to be approximately 30,000.¹¹ Mart Laar even offered the figure of 75,000 arrested persons, of which approximately one third died in camps or were shot.¹² A recent publication speaks of “a war of annihilation against the national elites” in the Baltic republics.¹³ The authors of this paper estimate that approximately 13 to 15,000 persons fell victims to postwar cleansing. This number is much smaller than the amount of persons who could have been accused of being too close to the Germans or being ‘bourgeois nationalists’. There obviously was a need to come to terms with ‘hostile elements’ through a policy of compromise and not solely through the use of repressive measures. The paper is organised as follows: we briefly explore the scale of Estonian collaboration seen from the Soviet perspective and Soviet preparations in the rear, and then continue with describing and analysing the two-edged policy of cleansing and compromise.

Collaboration in Estonia seen from the Soviet perspective

Even though the German troops were greeted as liberators from Soviet oppression, and Nazi propaganda exploited that topic for a certain time, the Estonian population was soon disappointed with the new occupiers.¹⁴ Hopes for re-establishing

10. On Soviet repressions in Estonia see for example: David Feest, “Terror und Gewalt auf dem estnischen Dorf,” *Osteuropa*, 50, 6 (2000): 656–671; Kristi Kukk, Toivo Raun, eds., *Soviet Deportations in Estonia: Impact and Legacy: Articles and Life Histories* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2007); Leo Ōispuu, comp., *Political Arrests in Estonia*, 3 vols. (Tallinn, 1996–2005), *Deportation from Estonia to Russia*, 3 vols. (Tallinn, 1999–2003); Aigi Rahi-Tamm, *Teise maailmasõja järgsed massirepressioonid Eestis: Allikad ja uurimisseis* [Mass Repression in Estonia after World War II: Sources and State of Research] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004); Vello Salo, ed., *The White Book: Losses inflicted on the Estonian Nation by Occupation Regimes 1940–1991* (Tallinn: Estonian Encyclopaedia Publishers, 2005).

11. Misiunas, Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 354. Rein Taagepera calls the period 1945–1953 “years of genocide,” Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 77.

12. Mart Laar, “Eesti ja kommunism [Estonia and Communism],” in Stéphane Courtois et al., eds., *Kommunismi must raamat: Kuriteod, terror, repressioonid* [The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression] (Tallinn: Varrak, 2000), 853.

13. Jörg Barberowski, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror: Gewaltexzesse und Vernichtung im nationalsozialistischen und im stalinistischen Imperium* (Bonn: Dietz, 2006), 88.

14. On the German occupation see: Seppo Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der baltischen Länder 1941–1944: Zum nationalsozialistischen Inhalt der deutschen Besatzungspolitik* (Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura, 1973); Alvin Isberg, *Zu den Bedingungen des Befreiers: Kollaboration und Freiheitsstreben in dem von Deutschland besetzten Estland 1941 bis 1944* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992); Indrek Paavle, ed., *Population Losses in Estonia*.

independence or at least autonomy were not fulfilled. The Germans continued the policy of economic exploitation started by the Soviets. They won some support by revising the Soviet land reform, which was highly unpopular among peasants with average or larger landholdings. In general, German policy was less repressive towards ordinary Estonians than the Soviet one. Real or alleged communists and sympathisers were, of course, persecuted and often killed, but ordinary Estonian citizens remained vastly untouched. Estonian Jews perished in the Holocaust and part of the Roma population was murdered. Ethnic Russians were overrepresented among the victims of Nazi rule¹⁵. Approximately 8,000 inhabitants of the country were killed during three years of occupation. Most of the killing took place in 1941 and statistics indicate a declining level of repression in the following years.¹⁶ In addition, approximately 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) and 6,500 foreign Jews were murdered or died in camps.¹⁷ Thus, the large amount of victims notwithstanding, many Estonians saw Hitler as the lesser of two evils. This might help explain the widespread cooperation and even collaboration with the Germans.

From a Soviet point of view, collaboration reached unbearable levels and obviously the share of population fighting actively on the side of the Germans was larger than in any other part of German-occupied Europe. Anti-Soviet partisan units had spread up spontaneously in the summer of 1941. Some were involved in reprisal actions against communists and sympathisers. All able-bodied males aged 17 to 60 had to serve in 'Self-Defence' (*Omakaitse*). Their official number reached 73,000 in 1944,¹⁸ but was obviously smaller in reality. Most of them were simply on guarding duties after work hours once or twice a week. However, there were single units of 'Self-Defence' manned with full-time soldiers that took part in German war crimes in 1941. More than 70,000 Estonians, approximately 7 percent of the population, served as 'volunteer' legionaries, members of police battalions, mobilised Waffen SS soldiers or in other units on the German side, but it must be stressed that many 'volunteers' were in fact pressed into service. Some police battalions fought in the antipartisan war and gained a bad reputation as a second occupying force in neighbouring Russian oblasts, as in the Pskov oblast, for instance.¹⁹ Up to 95 percent of Security Police employees (*Sicherheitspolizei*) in

II/1: German Occupation 1941-1944 (Tartu: Okupatsioonide Repressiivpoliitika Uurimise Riiklik Komisjon, 2002); Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*; Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei in Estland, 1941-1944: Eine Studie zur Kollaboration im Osten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

15. Estonia's Russians constituted 9 percent of the population, but 15 percent of the victims of the Nazis.

16. Indrek Paavle, "Sissejuhatus [Introduction]," in Paavle, ed., *Population Losses...*, 13, 17.

17. Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians, the Holocaust, and the Problem of Collaboration* (PhD-thesis, Brandeis University, 2005), 611.

18. Statiev, *Social Conflict and Counterinsurgency*, op.cit., 67.

19. Anna Kormina, Sergej Štyrkov, "Niemand und nichts ist vergessen. Die Okkupation in mündlichen Zeugnissen," *Osteuropa*, 55, 4-6 (2005), 447-449.

Estonia were ethnic Estonians.²⁰ They served thus at the centre of the German repressive apparatus. Obviously, the majority of concentration and POW camp guards also were locals.²¹ All levels of the administration including the upper levels of the Estonian Self-Administration (*Landeseigene Selbstverwaltung, Omavalitsus*) were in the hands of Estonians, but they stood under German control of the German Civil Administration (*deutsche Zivilverwaltung*). This was part of German labour-saving policy in occupied Estonia: as much administrative or police work as possible had to be conducted by locals under German supervision (*Aufsichtsverwaltung*).²² One should not forget that ethnic minorities like Russians and Swedes also entered German service. In the concentration camp system Vaivara for example, Russian *Schutzmannschaftskompanien* served as guards.²³ In September 1944, according to one researcher, only 4,500 of the 60,000 Estonian troops serving along different lines in the Waffen-SS, Border Defence Units, etc., were evacuated from Estonia.²⁴ Viewed from Moscow, nearly all adult males staying in occupied Estonia could be considered suspect and guilty. Former members of parties and other organisations of the prewar republic were also highly suspicious and they were often claimed to be bourgeois nationalists. In comparison with the smaller support for the Germans exposed by Crimean Tatars, Chechens or Kalmyks, who were deported collectively as a reprisal, Estonian cooperation and collaboration with the Germans had reached a higher level. The Soviet leadership was clearly determined to purge the Estonian SSR.

When Soviet troops began to invade the country in the fall of 1944, more than 70,000 Estonians fled to Scandinavia or Germany.²⁵ It seems obvious that the majority of high-ranking collaborators or real perpetrators, who committed war crimes or participated in the Holocaust, were among them, but they formed, of course, only a small minority of all refugees. Most of the people fled because they feared Soviet terror and reprisals. Before German troops left Estonia, they helped form a number of anti-Soviet partisan units. Other units formed spontaneously and thousands hid in the forests in fear of arrest or mobilisation into the Red Army. Armed resistance only started to fade out in the late 1940s, and ended in the mid-1950s.²⁶ During the German evacuation in September 1944, a short-lived provisional

20. Argo Kuusik, "Security Police and SD in Estonia in 1941-1944," in Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 592.

21. Helmut Krausnick, Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Vlg-Anst., 1981), 597.

22. Meelis Maripuu, Indrek Paavle, "Die deutsche Zivilverwaltung in Estland und die estnische Selbstverwaltung," in Mertelsmann, ed., *Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt...*, 96-129.

23. Aivar Niglas, Toomas Hiio, "Estonian Defence Battalions, Police Battalions in the German Armed Forces," in Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 867.

24. Isberg, *Zu den Bedingungen...*, 142.

25. Kaja Kumer-Haukanõmm, Tiit Rosenberg, Tiit Tammaru, eds., *Suur põgenemine 1944: Eestlaste lahkumine läände ning selle mõjud* [The Big Flight 1944: Estonians leaving for the West and the Effects] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2006).

26. Mart Laar, *War in the Woods: Estonia's Struggle for Survival, 1944-1956* (Washington DC: Compass Press, 1992); Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic*

Estonian government headed by Otto Tief was established in Tallinn and partly took control of the city with the help of the Estonian units it commanded.²⁷ Thus, in the fall of 1944, the capital of the Estonian SSR was technically speaking ‘liberated’ by the Soviets from the Estonians and not from the Nazis with the flag of independent Estonia flying on government buildings for a short while instead of the swastika. When the Soviets mobilised Estonians into the Red Army in 1944–1945, they found out that many of them were veterans of German units who had thrown their uniforms away and gone home during the German retreat, thus risking punishment as deserters.

Most of the Soviet troops were not greeted with cheers when they marched in, with the possible exception of the Estonian Rifle Corps, a unit specially designed for ethnic Estonians. Soviet soldiers felt and partly behaved as if on enemy territory.²⁸ Soviet rule in the countryside proved extremely weak. The population was hostile and anti-Russian.²⁹ The extreme lack of reliable local cadres made the situation even more difficult.

From today’s perspective, the question of collaboration is rather complicated, starting with the fact that there is no simple definition for it.³⁰ Estonia was occupied and lost independence in 1940; there was no internationally recognised government in exile. Its citizens received Soviet citizenship against their will and lived for three years under German occupation. While some Estonians definitely participated in German crimes, one can hardly speak of treason to the fatherland. They did not owe Stalin or the Soviet government any loyalty. Obviously, the Soviets interpreted activities such as serving in the lower ranks of Nazi administration or being a village elder as collaboration — occupations which usually would not be considered collaboration.

Preparations in the Soviet Rear

Evacuees initially faced meagre living conditions, but the Estonian soldiers in labour battalions were definitely worse off. Their camps, labour duties and

States (Vilnius: Du Ka, 1999); Pearu Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud Eesti vastupanuliikumisega: Banditismivastase Võitluse Osakond aastatel 1944–1947* [The Battles of Soviet Power with Estonian Resistance: The Department for Fighting against Banditism 1944–1947] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2007); Elena Zubkova, “‘Lesnye brat’ia’ v Pribaltike: voina posle voyny [‘Forest Brothers’ in the Baltic: War after the War],” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 51, 2 (2007): 74–90, et 3 (2007): 14–30.

27. Andres Parmas, ed., *Otto Tief ja 1944 a. vahevalitsus* [Otto Tief and the Interim Government of 1944] (Tartu, 2006); Mart Laar, *September 1944: Otto Tiefi valitsus* [September 1944: Otto Tief’s Government] (Tallinn: Varrak, 2007).

28. Local authorities complained about theft, robbery, rape and even murder. According to a report on the work of the *militiia*, Red Army soldiers perpetrated the majority of registered crimes in the fourth quarter of 1944, ERAF (Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaal — Branch of the Estonian State Archives), 1-3-435, 1.

29. O. Mertelsmann, “How the Russians Turned into the Image of the ‘National Enemy’ of the Estonians,” *Pro Ethnologia*, 19 (2005): 43–58.

30. See Joachim Tauber, ed., “Kollaboration” in *Nordosteuropa: Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

provision of food had been ill-prepared due to the war. Minimal food rations, forced neck-breaking work, inadequate clothing or shelter, hunger, overwork and the cold took a grim toll. Approximately one third of the men died within six months.³¹ During the winter of 1941-1942, the survivors were freed, fed and incorporated into new fighting units, especially the Estonian Rifle Corps or, in case of ill health, sent to work in the rear.

Preparations for recapturing Estonia started slowly, but immediately. Evacuated artists were for example assembled in Iaroslavl to form art ensembles and groups. From February 1942 to February 1944, in Moscow and afterwards Leningrad, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Estonian CP strove to assemble party functionaries, prepare propaganda for the homeland, support Soviet partisans there, which failed, and make arrangements for the postwar order in their native country.³² In 1943, preparations gained speed. The party recruited new members among Estonian soldiers and evacuees. Special courses were offered to train tractor drivers, bookkeepers or NKVD specialists for future service in Estonia. Soviet institutions were built up to be implanted in the ESSR after victory. The state also recruited ethnic Estonians from the 'old republics' for a mission in their 'historic fatherland'. As early as December 1943, the NKVD of the ESSR comprised roughly 400 cadres and the NKGB approximately 170, nine months before they began serving inside Estonia. Nevertheless, the leading Estonian communists thought that they were far too few to fulfil the necessary duties after the 'liberation'. New courses had to be held and more cadres recruited.³³

Special attention was given to the preparation of future purges. Archives played an important role in those repressions. In 1940, the Estonian archives system became attached to the NKVD. When Gottlieb Ney, still director of the Estonian State Archives at that moment, expressed surprise over the subordination of the archives to the NKVD, Fomin, head of the Central Archival Administration of the NKVD (*Glavnoe Arkhivnoe Upravlenie NKVD SSSR*, abbreviated GAU), answered that the commonly shared view that archives were research institutions should quickly be forgotten. This might be so in the capitalist world, but in "the Soviet country the main task of archives is to expose class enemies in order that they be destroyed."³⁴

31. Urmas Usai, ed., *Eestlased tööpataljonides 1941-1942. Mälestusi ja dokumente. Esimene raamat* [Estonians in Labour Battalions 1941-1942. Memories and Documents. First Book] (Tallinn: Olion, 1993), 5-18.

32. Olaf Kuuli, *Sotsialistid ja kommunistid Eestis 1917-1991* [Socialists and Communists in Estonia 1917-1991] (Tallinn: O. Kuuli, 1999), 88-89; Olev Liivik, "Keskkomitee [Central Committee]," in Enn Tarvel, ed., *Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei Keskkomitee organisatsiooniline struktuur 1940-1991* [The Organisational Structure of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party] (Tallinn: Kistler-Ritso Eesti Sihtasutus, 2002), 35.

33. Meeting of the Bureau of the CC of the ECP(b), 24 and 28 December 1943, ERAF 1-4-97, 85-86.

34. Gottlieb Ney, "Teadlasest tshekistiks [From Scientist to Chekist]," in Richard Maasing, ed., *Eesti riik ja rahvas Teises maailmasõjas. Punane aasta* [The Estonian State and Nation in the Second World War. The Red Year], vol. 3 (Stockholm: EMP, 1956), 154.

In October 1940, the NKVD archival departments in Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldova, Karelia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were ordered to introduce the registration of their 'counterrevolutionary elements'. It was a continuation of the all-Union card index of 'politically coloured persons' that had been introduced one year previous, in September 1939. In the spring of 1941, the cards files on 'political colouring' already registered 37,794 persons in Estonia.³⁵ The compilation of the card index was continued in Kirov in the Soviet rear, where the materials of the special department of the Estonian State Archives had been evacuated. The card index was supplemented by approximately 53,000 new cards.

From February till August 1944, the head of the Department of the Estonian Archives Bernhard Veimer stayed in Leningrad in order to work through the newspapers that had been published in Estonia during German occupation. In those papers he had to search for 'anti-Soviet elements'. The sought persons were not only political figures, policemen or mobilised servicemen in the German army, but also economists, farmers, members of the clergy, scientists, artists, sportsmen, newspaper reporters, etc. On 7 July 1944, Veimer presented the data to the would-be chiefs of the county departments of the NKVD-NKGB, who then drew up special lists.³⁶ In 1944, when preparations were made to reconquer Estonia, the Central Archival Administration repeatedly reminded Veimer of the requirement that the archives had to inform the security organs and SMERSH about confidential materials in stocks and help them in their operative work.³⁷ In the fall of 1944, about 160,000 biographical cards had been added to the Soviets' operative use. Those personal biographical cards had been compiled by the Germans between 1941 and 1944 and had been left in Estonia after their retreat. The cards contained data mainly about those Estonian citizens who had served in the German troops, been killed, wounded or missing at the front.

Compilation of the files continued in Tallinn after October 1944. In 1945, more than 45,000 cards were filed. The main emphasis was placed on searching through the holdings of the institutions operating during German occupation. The archives had to provide the necessary information about the structure of those institutions for the operative departments.³⁸ Simultaneously, the archives gathered data about former members of 'Self-Defence' and German units, or about those missing or fallen into captivity. In the main focus of interest was information about an

35. Svodnyi ochet otdela sekretnykh fondov, 25 December 1942, ERAF R1490-1-1, 13; Margus Lääne, Valdur Ohmann, "Kuidas komprat koguti? NKGB infoallikad 1941 aastast osaliselt säilinud operatiivandmete põhjal [How Kompromat was collected? The Information Sources of NKGB in 1941 on the Basis of partly preserved Operation Data]," *Tuna* 10, 4 (2007): 86-88.

36. Report by Bernhard Veimer to Nikitinskii, head of the GAU NKVD SSR, and Aleksander Resev, head of the NKVD ESSR, "Dokladnaia zapiska o prodelannoi rabote za vremia moego prebyvaniia v Leningrade ot 4/II do 25/VII", 27 July 1944, ERAF 17/1-1-7, 38.

37. Letter by Gurianov, deputy head of the GAU NKVD SSR, to Bernhard Veimer, ERA (Eesti Riigiarhiiv — Estonian State Archives), R-2338-1-34, 94.

38. "Plan raboty Arkhivnogo Otdela NKVD ESSR," 24 January 1945, ERA R-2338-1-59, 3.

individual's political loyalty. Every person who had been questioned as a witness at interrogation, was registered as well.

Three operational groups were prepared and trained in the Soviet rear to establish Soviet power in Estonia after liberation. Their actions were to be coordinated by a particular operation staff of the NKVD.³⁹ Those operational groups went into action immediately after the Red Army's offensive in the late summer of 1944. At that time the groups were assigned the following tasks: finding individuals who had cooperated with the Germans, traitors, enemy agents and anti-Soviet elements; liquidation of Nazi and espionage cells; destruction of anti-Soviet partisan units; organisation of counterintelligence against foreign intelligence services and centres of Baltic emigrants.⁴⁰ The operational groups approached together with the Red Army and should conduct the registration of the local population, control documents and screen people.⁴¹

Cleansing and Compromise

When the Soviets retook control of Estonia in September 1944, the population had declined by one quarter. According to the estimation of the Statistical Office, on 1 January 1945 there lived 854,000 people in the ESSR, 280,000 less than in the late 1930s. The reasons for this drop were manifold. Roughly 20,000 people, not all of them ethnic Germans, were part of the resettlement of Baltic Germans between 1939 and 1941. When German troops arrived, the population had already dropped by 100,000 due to Soviet evacuation, one mass deportation, mobilisation and arrests. The Germans killed approximately 8,000 people, 30,000 died in the war, 7,000 ethnic Swedes resettled to Sweden and more than 70,000 Estonians flew abroad. A small number served as *Ostarbeiter* in Germany, mainly ethnic Russians. Natural population growth had been negative since 1940. Additionally, Soviet population data did not include soldiers, POWs and other prisoners, thus the real population of the country was larger than indicated.⁴²

The population increased later due to return migration from Russia, repatriation from Germany usually after passing through a filtration camp,⁴³ demobilisation of

39. Tõnu Tannberg, "Hilisstalinistlik Eesti NSV [The late Stalinist Estonian SSR]," *Eesti ajalugu* VI, 273.

40. Report by Boris Kumm, ESSR minister of State Security, to the ECP(b) Central Committee, "Dokladnaia zapiska o rabote organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti Estonskoi SSR za period 1940-1941 gg. i 1944-1948 gg.," ERAF 1-47-37, 143-144.

41. Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud...*, 29.

42. Mertelsmann, *Der stalinistische Umbau...*, 116-120.

43. In 1945, 5,470 Estonians were repatriated. Report on the work of the Department for Repatriation to Nikolai Karotamm, 9 October 1948, ERAF 1-47-29, 45. One author estimates the total to be approximately 12,000 in 1944-1945. Ranno Roosi, "Repatriations to Estonia and Repatriation Policy in ESSR 1944-1955," Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 1114. Another publication offers a figure of 14,300 repatriated persons to Estonia until March 1946, Iu.A. Poliakov, ed., *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki* [The

soldiers, release of POWs and members of labour battalions, and massive immigration from the 'old republics'. A first ethnic cleansing took place in the summer of 1945. The few remaining ethnic Germans, approximately 400 persons, including non-German family members who voluntarily followed, were deported.⁴⁴ All foreign citizens in the republic, a total of 64, were observed with great scrutiny and a special list of them was kept, which proved that single ethnic Germans escaped deportation.⁴⁵ A second wave of ethnic cleansing targeting ethnic Finns, Ingrians and Karelians, took place in 1946-1947.⁴⁶ The latter had settled down in Estonia during or after the war because of the proximity of languages, the shared protestant religion, and to flee from persecution in their homelands in Soviet Karelia and the Leningrad oblast. Usually, they had 24 hours to leave for the Russian interior. Their passports were stamped with the impression '§58-1', which meant 'traitor'.

Together with the reoccupation of the Baltic republics, the attention of the Kremlin became focussed for a short while on the 'Baltic question'. Concerning all three Baltic communist parties, the Orgbureau of the CC VKP(b) issued decisions about 'mistakes and deficits' in the operation of party organisations between the end of October and the beginning of November 1944. Those documents turned into instructions for the continuation of the process of Sovietisation and influenced local policy for the forthcoming years. The fight against 'bourgeois nationalism' was one of the main issues for the Baltic parties.⁴⁷ For all three Baltic republics special bureaus were established at the Central Committee in Moscow to ease control, the flow of information, the implementation of Soviet policy, and the cleansing of 'enemy elements'.⁴⁸ Obviously, in the late summer and fall of 1944, Stalin took the situation under his control and met the first party secretaries of the Baltic republics personally in August 1944. Later, this assignment was delegated to Andrei

Population of Russia in the 20th Century: Historical Scetch], T. 2. 1940-1959 (M.: ROSSPEN, 2001), 154. One source gives a figure of 20,252 by 1 September 1949, ERAF 17/1-1-141, 59.

44. Indrek Jürjo, "Täiendusi baltisakslaste ümberasutamise ja Eestisse jäänud sakslaste saatuse kohta NKVD arhiivallikate põhjal [Additions to the Resettlement of Baltic Germans and the Fate of Germans Remaining in Estonia on the Basis of NKVD Archival Documents]," in Sirje Kivimäe, ed., *Umsiedlung 60: Baltisakslaste organiseeritud lahkumine Eestist* [Resettlement 60: The Organised Leaving of Baltic Germans from Estonia] (Tallinn: Baltisaksa Kultuuri Selts Eestis, 2000), 109-134; A. Rahi-Tamm, "Deportation und Verfolgung in Estland 1939-1953," in Mertelsmann ed., *Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt...*, 211-237.

45. List of foreigners residing in the ESSR, 29 December 1945, ERAF 1-3-108.

46. Riina Reinvelt, *Ingeri elud ja lood: Kultuurianalüütiline eluloouurimus* [Ingrian Lives and Stories: Cultural-Analytical Life Story Research] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli etnoloogia õppetool, 2002).

47. Tõnu Tannberg, "Moskva institutsionaalsed ja nomenklatuursed kontrollimehhanismid Eesti NSVs sõjajärgsetel aastatel [Moscow's Institutional and Nomenclatural Control Mechanisms in the Estonian SSR in the Postwar Years]," in Tannberg, ed., *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940-1953...*, 227.

48. Ibid., 228-239; Geoffrey Swain, "'Cleaning up Soviet Latvia': the Bureau for Latvia (Latburow), 1944-1947," in Mertelsmann, ed., *The Sovietization of the Baltic States...*, 63-84.

Zhdanov, Georgii Malenkov and Mikhail Suslov,⁴⁹ while Stalin was kept informed about the activities of the respective bureaus.

Economic planning for reconstruction had already started in the rear, but the plan followed the general Soviet tendency. The destroyed infrastructure — electric power stations or bridges — would have to be rebuilt first. Then heavy industry and the energy sector had to expand. The reconstruction of housing, food and consumer goods production received only low priority in the planning, which partly explains why it took so long for the population to recover from the war. Actually, the provision of food and nutrition standards were worse in 1946-1947 than during the war due to the influence of the famine in other Soviet regions and Soviet agricultural policy.⁵⁰ Economic transition and reconstruction was interwoven with measures against ‘enemies’, especially during the second land reform (1944-1947). Edgar Tõnurist, head of the Executive Committee of Tartu County, for example, proclaimed in January 1945 that in his county alone more than 800 farms of ‘enemies of the people’ and ‘collaborators with the Germans’ had been reduced to a size of five to seven hectares. He complained that “the class war with our enemies in the villages has not reached its full scale yet.”⁵¹ Plenipotentiaries were sent to villages to search together with local activists for ‘active collaborators’, often on public meetings.⁵² In total, 123,000 hectares of land were confiscated⁵³ from approximately 9,000 households. Of course, there were single voices like that of a certain comrade Tikk, who complained that ‘collaborators’ were pampered and should be punished more severely.⁵⁴ Many of the families later fell victim to the mass deportation of 1949. Two thirds of the 20,600 deportees, among them ‘collaborators’, belonged to the category of ‘enemies of the people’. In September 1945, the confiscation was ordered of houses, farm equipment, animals and personal belongings of those households, whose head fled with the Germans, or in which a family member participated in the armed anti-Soviet partisan struggle.⁵⁵

After the arrival of the Red Army, the operational groups started their activities. The members of the provisional government headed by Otto Tief and associated circles were arrested. In October 1944, a cleansing operation began in Tallinn, which led to 196 arrests. The Soviet NKGB (People’s Commissariat of State Security) had ordered all institutions to hand over documents from the period of German occupation to ease the search for potential enemies. In December 1944, the

49. Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml’*..., 141-145.

50. Mertelsmann, *Der stalinistische Umbau*..., 93-99.

51. Stenographic protocol of the republican meeting of agricultural specialists, 17-19 January 1945, ERAF 1-4-239, 3.

52. Feest, “Terror und Gewalt...”, 663.

53. Valner Krinal, Otto Karma, Herbert Ligi, Feliks Sauks, *Eesti NSV majandusajalugu* [Economic History of the Estonian SSR] (Tallinn: Valgus, 1979), 182.

54. Protocol of the Estonian Peasant Conference, 22- 23 October 1944, ERAF 1-4-128, 94.

55. Aigi Rahi, *1949, aasta märtsiküüditamine Tartu linnas ja maakonnas* [The March Deportation 1949 in the Town and County of Tartu] (Tartu: Kleio, 1998), 26.

Central Committee of the Estonian CP(b) decided that all passports had to be exchanged, screening thus the entire urban population. Until the beginning of 1946, a total of 280,000 new passports were issued after a thorough control of their holders. In January 1945, there already were 4,200 persons in Estonian prisons.⁵⁶

In April 1944, the Estonian Central Committee, still in Leningrad, issued a decision on the re-establishment of destruction battalions consisting of party and Komsomol members, local activists and employees of party and security organs. They were formed on a territorial basis between 1944 and 1945 and the Central Staff was headed by First Party Secretary Nikolai Karotamm himself.⁵⁷ The destruction battalions had 1,653 members on 1 January 1945 and 5,804 one year later.⁵⁸ Participation was 'voluntary' and unpaid. They were used as a sort of auxiliary unit for the *militsia*, state security and NKVD in antipartisan warfare. Initially, special security units dealt with partisans. After this failed, tactics changed and the use of destruction battalions was preferred in 1945. Their military value was actually quite small, members often had a low level of discipline and some were involved, like many other soldiers and security personnel, in theft, robbery and terrorising the local population.⁵⁹

The party's political priorities are revealed in a report to Stalin on the activities of the Estonian Bureau of the Central Committee of VKP(b) dated from early May 1945:

The main activities of the Estonian Bureau were to deal with further cleansing the republic of enemy elements, to strengthen local party and state organs, to educate cadres, to reconstruct the economy, to conduct an agricultural reform and to improve the political education of the population.

1. Cleansing the republic of enemy elements

The bourgeois-nationalist underground

As we already reported, a large number of active participants of Estonian military-fascist and bourgeois-nationalist organisations could not flee to Germany, Sweden or Finland [...]

According to this report, dated from October 1944 to April 1945, a total of 8,909 people were arrested for political reasons. The text mentions the offer of an amnesty for those evading conscription into the Red Army by hiding in the forests. Among the mobilised soldiers turning up in recruitment offices, mobilised veterans of the German army served in labour or construction battalions.⁶⁰ It is important

56. Tannberg, "Hilisstalinistlik Eesti NSV," 275.

57. Tiit Noormets, Valdur Ohmann, "Saateks [Introduction]," in Tiit Noormets, Valdur Ohmann, ed., *Hävitajad. Nõukogude hävituspataljoniid Eestis 1944-1954. Dokumentide kogumik* [Destroyers. Soviet Destroyer Battalions in Estonia 1944-1954. Compilation of Documents] (Tallinn: Riigiarhiiv, 2006), 16-19.

58. Statiev, *Social Conflict and Counterinsurgency*..., 221.

59. Lembit Raid, "Kas peremees või käsualune? Ülevaade Parteiarhiivi materjalidest II [Master or Subordinate? Overview of Materials from the Party Archives II]," *Kleio*, no. 8 (1993): 42-43.

60. Report on the activities of the Estonian Bureau of the CC VCP(b), 1 January-1 May 1945, RGASPI (Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv social'no-politicheskoi istorii), f. 598, op. 1, d. 2, l. 2-6.

that even though the report stresses the priority of cleansing, it also reveals elements of the compromise policy in its proposal for amnesty.

According to incomplete data of a research team headed by Leo Õispuu in 1944-1945, at least 13,700 political arrests, or 37 percent of the total of the ten-year period of Stalinism, took place. A total of 381 death penalties are documented and 2,600 arrested persons did not survive. From 1946 to 1953, only 178 death penalties were registered in comparison to 1,874 in 1940-1941 due to the temporary abandonment of the death sentence between May 1947 and January 1950.⁶¹ Thus, postwar cleansing was less brutal than the destruction of Estonia's elite before the war. Still, the scale of arrests was so massive that according to the *svodki*, the reports on the sentiment of the population, people were asking about those arrests at public meetings.⁶²

Soviet security searched for alleged and real collaborators and war criminals among the Estonian German-army veterans, who were regular POWs or serving in a labour battalion, in filtration camps or as regular soldiers in the Soviet army. According to a directive dated October 1943 by Lavrentii Beria and Vsevolod Merkulov, the Soviet People's Commissars of the Interior and State Security, all former Baltic members of German units had at least to pass through filtration, soldiers having participated in war crimes and officers were to be arrested.⁶³ For example, in SMERSH's Special Filtration Camp no. 0316 located in Põllküla, 15,937 people, among them 13,340 soldiers, had been controlled before 22 November 1945. Those former Soviet soldiers, who had deserted their army and run over to the Germans, usually received a punishment of six years in a special settlement. Obviously, thousands received a similar sentence: for example, on 1 September 1945, a convoy with 1,605 men, mainly Estonians, headed eastwards.⁶⁴ Still, we assume that a certain number of German-army veterans did not pass through any filtration camps. They were sent directly to service in the Red Army or the labour and construction battalions. Several of them were punished later.

In time, cleansing turned more and more against 'bourgeois nationalists'. At the fifth Plenum of the Estonian CP(b) in early December 1944, a warning was already given against any Estonian special way. Arrests of intellectuals started afterwards.⁶⁵

61. Õispuu, ed., *Political Arrests*, vol. 2, D5. The real amount of arrests was obviously slightly larger. The same team did identify 25,000 political arrests between 1944 and 1952, while a report for Khrushchev offered a number of 45,000 arrests for the same period (Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*..., 332). The figures for Khrushchev might have also included ordinary crimes. Aleksandr Diukov's estimation of 10,000 arrests for 1944-1945 is definitely too low. See Aleksandr Diukov, *Mif o genocide: Repressii sovetskikh vlastei v Estonii (1940-1953)* [The Genocide Myth: Repression of Soviet Power in Estonia (1940-1953)] (M.: Aleksei Iakovlev, 2007), 89.

62. For example *Svodka* no. 4, 12 July 1945, ERAF 1-3-115, 14.

63. "Sovmestnaia direktiva NKVD SSSR i NKGB SSSR No. 494/94," Diukov, *Mif o genocide*..., 121-123.

64. Erich Kaup, "Sõjavangilaagrid Eestis 1944-1949 [POW Camps in Estonia 1944-1949]," *Kleio: Ajaloo ajakiri* 2 (1995): 34-35.

65. Feest, "Terror und Gewalt...", 664.

Estonia's first party secretary, Nikolai Karotamm, explained the wave of arrests to local officials in the spring of 1945 in the following way: "When there are arrests, one has to explain how much this is demanded, explain that the population demands it. We receive anonymous letters, sometimes with a signature, sometimes without, which describe how in a certain village some enemy is active."⁶⁶ Of course, denunciations arrived, but the main initiative for cleansing came from the Kremlin and there is no archival evidence for a broad popular support of the measures. In fact, the regime encouraged denunciation and published corresponding articles in newspapers. A decree by the ESSR Council of People's Commissars dated 17 June 1945 regulated how complaints and denunciations should be handled by local authorities. They should be registered and worked through for three days. In Soviet institutions special boxes equipped with paper and pencil in visible places served to take the complaints.⁶⁷

Apart from 'collaborators', 'bourgeois nationalists', 'bandits' (anti-Soviet partisans), 'enemies of the people' and also 'former people' fell under suspicion and were purged from responsible positions. For example, the people's commissar for trade, Hansen, and his deputy, Jõgi, were rebutted by the ECP(b) Central Committee Bureau for allowing too many former shop or restaurant owners to work in the system of socialist trade. The Bureau held the 'former people' responsible for all the shortcomings in trade caused by drinking, fraud, embezzlement and corruption.⁶⁸

On orders from Moscow, Baltic inmates of filtration camps were sent to camps in their respective home countries in April 1946.⁶⁹ They usually were released in the following years. The regime dealt with Baltic POWs in the same manner. By October 1948, out of 9,000 POWs arriving from other Soviet republics 7,900 had already been released.⁷⁰ According to a directive by the Soviet Ministry of the Interior dated 20 April 1946, mobilised Balts serving in German units as privates or sergeants were exempted from the usual punishment reserved for Soviet citizens who had been members of the German forces: six years of forced labour in a special settlement.⁷¹ This was an important difference in the treatment of German-army veterans from the Baltic republics and those from other Soviet regions: only a minority was arrested and punished. Some became regular soldiers of the Red

66. ERAF 1-4-245, 26.

67. The decree was even published. Rahi, *1949, aasta märtsiküüditamine...*, 32.

68. Protocol of the meeting of the ECP(b) Central Committee Bureau, 7 June 1945, ERAF 1-4-189, 33-35.

69. Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*..., 164.

70. Report on the work of the Department for Repatriation to Nikolai Karotamm, 9 October 1948, ERAF 1-47-29, 46.

71. "Vypiska iz direktivy ministra vnutrennikh del SSR, No. 97," *Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh i normativnykh aktov o repressiiakh i rehabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii* [Collection of Legal and Normative Acts concerning Repression and Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression] (M.: Izd. Respublika, 1993), 114-116.

Army, others served in labour or construction battalions and were released largely in 1946-47, and a third group consisted of regular POWs.

Real perpetrators frequently received the death penalty during the postwar years, and if not, were often released by 1956, remarkably earlier than 'bourgeois-nationalists' or those Estonians deported as 'nationalists' for 'eternal times' (*vyselelnnye navechno; napravliat' na spetspocelenie navechno*)⁷² in 1949. Others were imprisoned until 1965. Looking at the archival evidence, it seems that persecuting real and potential political enemies of the regime became far more important than punishing war criminals and collaborators. This interpretation is supported by the fact that crimes committed outside the Estonian SSR, as in the case of members of police battalions, were rarely persecuted at all, because the authorities paid less attention to them.⁷³ The Holocaust trials in the 1960s and 1970s in Estonia and Latvia looked partly like show trials aiming to incriminate Baltic émigrés.⁷⁴ The defendants in the Estonian trial of 1961 were known to the Soviet authorities much earlier, one had even been a KGB informer until the late 1950s.⁷⁵ Most of the German security police's files remained in the Tallinn archives and western authorities had no access to them until the breakdown of the Soviet Union. A number of war crimes could have been persecuted in the West if those documents had been available. While we clearly see a peak in death penalties for war crimes in the immediate postwar period, on the long run persecuting the real or alleged opposition became far more important than punishing people involved in the killing of communists and Jews during the war. On the one hand, we might interpret this as part of the compromise policy. Collaboration with the Germans was so widespread that it was perhaps preferable to silence the problem and establish an image of the Estonians solely as Nazi victims by inflating the actual number of casualties: the Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation of War Losses multiplied that number by eight. On the other hand, state security possessed a steadily growing number of card files on the Estonian population. The amount of compromising data accumulated in the course of massive inspection into archival stocks was enormous. Broadly assessing it, about one third of the Estonian population was recorded in the card index. There was much more information when the state security used them for the purpose of direct accusations in the 1940s and 1950s. Dark spots in the life of a person could not only lead to discrimination, but helped enforce obedience or could be used when recruiting informers and agents. In

72. "Eternal times" as far as even the next generation would have no right to return to home ever.

73. Indrek Paavle, "Soviet Investigations concerning the Activities of Estonian Defence Battalions and Police Battalions of the German Armed Forces in 1941-1944," in Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, eds., *Estonia 1940-1945...*, 877.

74. On the Latvian case see Andrew Ezergailis, *Nazi/Soviet Disinformation about the Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Latvia: Daugavas Vanagi: Who Are They — Revisited* (Riga: Latvijas 50 gadu okupācijas muzeja fonds, 2005), 55.

75. Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei...*, 232.

the repression of armed resistance and possible opposition, agents and informers played a crucial role and they had to be recruited among the right circles.

Looking at the materials of the Extraordinary State Commission for Estonia, we realise that some files, for example the ones about the brutal end of the Klooga concentration camp, were compiled accurately and with great detail.⁷⁶ Those files can be used as sources for justice or historians. But the majority were written and compiled in great haste and mainly based on the accounts of hardly reliable eye-witnesses. They are inaccurate, cramped with factual errors, contain propaganda and inflate damages and the number of victims.⁷⁷ In other words, they cannot be very useful for later thorough investigation.⁷⁸ Of course, the Soviet army captured trophy documents, which helped with the examination of atrocities and singling out the guilty. But cleansing in Estonia and in the rest of the former German occupation zone certainly possessed a campaign character. Quick results were needed. When we look at interrogation protocols and listen to oral history narratives by those who were arrested and survived imprisonment, it seems clear that painstaking reconstruction of crimes and search for clear evidence did not rank high on the Soviet agenda. Confessions could be obtained by torture and convictions could be made on the basis of false accusations.⁷⁹ Needless to say, among the victims of the postwar purge there were some real perpetrators, murderers or collaborators, but the overwhelming majority was by any 'normal' legal standard innocent or not proven guilty.

Concerning treason against the fatherland, one may ask which country Estonian citizens should have been loyal to. Their state had been occupied and annexed and they received Soviet citizenship against their will. Immediately after the war, most of them did not even possess any Soviet documents/passports, but still identified themselves with an Estonian passport. In essence, they could not betray the USSR because it was not their fatherland during the war. The Soviet leadership acknowledged this somehow: this might partly explain why Estonians were treated more leniently than the inhabitants of the 'old republics'.

As concerns 'horizontal collaboration' with the Germans which, according to oral history, was widespread in Estonia and made easier by the 'high racial status' that the Estonians received from the Nazis, the authors of this paper do not know of any case of persecution by the Soviets. The country had served as a safe hinterland

76. GARF (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), f. P-7021, op. 97, d. 1.

77. The report of the Extraordinary Commission of the ESSR claimed at least 60,000 Estonian victims of Nazi occupation (GARF, f. P-7021, op. 97, d. 871, l. 8), while in reality approximately 8,000 victims including Estonia's Jews and part of the Gypsy population were killed by the Nazis.

78. On the commission in general see Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Towards a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 6 (2005): 797-831.

79. The persecution of collaborators faced the same problems as the one of German war criminals. See Andreas Hilger, "Sowjetische Justiz und Kriegsverbrechen. Dokumente zu den Verurteilungen deutscher Kriegsgefangener 1941-1949," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 54 (2006): 461-515.

especially for short-term holidays from the front, because there was no partisan activity and a well-sorted black market. Sexual relations with Germans were quite common, given the fact that there was a lack of young Estonian males. German soldiers were perceived by many Estonian women as polite and educated, and they gave them access to rare goods.⁸⁰

The armed, anti-Soviet resistance in Estonia was far weaker than in Lithuania or western Ukraine. It was decentralised and lacking in leadership because potential leaders had been arrested, often pre-emptively, as happened to approximately 1,000 members of 'Self-Defence' up to July 1945.⁸¹ Nevertheless, 1945 saw a peak in armed resistance. According to the documentation of the Ministry of the Interior, that year, 565 partisans were killed, 3,894 arrested and 1,494 legalised. In the conflict, 111 members of security, soldiers and activists and 142 other citizens lost their lives.⁸² In 1944, the primary task for the security organs upon their return was similarly to re-establish an agent network and set it to work. Circulars no. 366/48 of 16 July 1943 and no. 478/89 of 1 October 1943 of the Soviet NKVD and NKGB were used as guidelines in carrying out investigations and organising an agent-operational activity.⁸³ In attempting to appraise the effectiveness of the work being done by agents, we can examine the progress of the struggle against the resistance movement. The success that had been hoped for was not achieved in 1945, and the weakness of the network of NKGB agents was mentioned as the primary reason for this. The overwhelming majority of agents in the NKVD network were also informers whose information proved to be either useless or only of momentary usefulness. Considering the continual mobility of the 'forest brothers', it was not particularly possible to use the information obtained from informers concerning their location. The main problem was the lack of infiltrator agents. In September 1945, the leaders of operational groups in all county departments of the NKVD and NKGB were obliged to create a network of infiltrator agents in bandit groups and illegal formations and to use that network to liquidate 'nationalist elements'.⁸⁴

One of the main strategies to fight resistance was amnesties and legalisation. The first amnesty was proclaimed in Estonia in October 1944, and a larger one in May 1945. Georgii Perov, head of the CC VKP(b) Bureau for Estonia saw

80. On women's experiences under German occupation see Rutt Hinrikus (ed.), *Sõja ajal kasvanud tüdrukud: Eesti naiste mälestused Saksa okupatsioonist* [Girls Growing up during the War: The Recollections of Estonian Women on the German Occupation] (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2006).

81. Statiev, *Social Conflict and Counterinsurgency*..., 94.

82. "Spravka o rabote organov MVD Estonskoi SSR po likvidatsii natsionalisticheskogo podpol'ia i ego vooruzhennykh band za period s 1944 po 1 iunia 1953 goda," Tannberg, *Politika Moskvu*..., 289-297.

83. Letter of Aleksander Resev, head of NKVD ESSR, to all heads of County and Town Departments of NKVD ESSR, 23 February 1944, ERAF 17/1-1-1, 28-30.

84. Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud*..., 78-79. See also, for a comparison with the Lithuanian SSR: Arvydas Anušauskas, "La composition et les méthodes secrètes des organes de sécurité soviétiques en Lituanie, 1940-1953," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 42, 2-4 (2001): 321-356.

amnesties in June 1946 as a way to “return to legal existence people who hide in the forests in fear of reprisals for service in the German Army, and evade conscription into the Red Army and other similar offences.”⁸⁵ According to Elena Zubkova, the regime was ready for a compromise with those who accepted abandoning the armed struggle.⁸⁶ According to the Ministry of Interior, 3,000 people, mainly draft dodgers, were legalised in the ESSR in 1945.⁸⁷ In the process of legalisation, the individual had to pass necessary information, which helped the security organs in their struggle with the partisans.

In relation to membership in ‘Self-Defence’ for example, the party line was not clear. We know that many members were arrested and persecuted, but leading party officials like Arnold Veimer, head of Estonia’s Sovnarkom, argued convincingly against a general persecution: “You consider that all men having served in ‘Self-Defence’ are enemies, but you know that all men aged 16 to 55 were enlisted in ‘Self-Defence’. If you start action, think about this fact. You will build a wall between you and the population.”⁸⁸

The Estonian political leadership was far from being homogenous and its members’ views were influenced by their background. Ethnic Estonians and Russians born and raised in the country knew the local situation much better than Russian speakers and ethnic Estonians from the ‘old republics’ delegated to work in Estonia. In the party leadership dominated a group of former political prisoners from Estonia who had joined the party in the interwar period and had served a sentence during independence. Arnold Veimer was one of them. The so-called ‘June communists’ joined the party only after the communist takeover in the summer of 1940. They often were intellectuals with a left-wing affiliation (Johannes Vares-Barbarus, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR belonged to that group). First Party Secretary Nikolai Karotamm had lived for a long time in the USSR, but cooperated closely with the former political prisoners. Russian speakers from the ‘old republics’ were often sent to Estonia for only a couple of years, did not usually speak the language and served as controllers of the local party leadership. Among the ethnic Estonians many had strong feelings of national and cultural identity, and they might be characterised as ‘national communists’.⁸⁹ While the Estonian leadership obviously shared the view that cleansing was necessary, and actively participated in it, they nonetheless did not want the scale of repression to become too large, or to have ethnic Estonians

85. Statiev, *Social Conflict and Counterinsurgency*..., 196.

86. Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml’*..., 245.

87. Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud*..., 109.

88. Stenographic protocol of a meeting of the party apparatus concerning the fight against bandits, 7 August 1945, ERAF 1-4-246, 10.

89. On the leadership in the Baltic republics see also Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml’*..., 257-285; on nationalities policy see David Feest, “‘Neo-Korenizacija’ in den baltischen Sowjetrepubliken? Die Kommunistische Partei Estlands nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 54 (2006): 263-280.

replaced by too many Russians. Estonia's leading politicians had their own, national, agenda, which favoured the search for a compromise.

Among the main reasons for the compromise policy was the lack of local cadres. To run the Estonian SSR, Stalin needed ethnic Estonians. A certain amount of the elite of Russia's Estonians had been killed in the Great Terror (1937-38) during the 'national operations'.⁹⁰ As a result, cadres had to be recruited mainly inside Estonia, even when their reliability was doubtful and their past was incriminating. Table 1 gives an overview of the personnel composition of the people's commissariats of the ESSR in 1945. One must add that this only includes information known to the regime: there obviously were many more German-army veterans or former members of bourgeois parties among employees, but records were not always available yet to check this. The presented data was compiled after a first purge in the people's commissariats. The political savvy of cadres was definitely low, even among party members. Most of the employees would not have been able to serve in a similar position in the 'old republics'. It is remarkable that even former members of the 'Estonian Veterans' League' — a radical right wing movement of the interwar period often characterised as fascist — were employed.

Table 1. Cadres of the people's commissariats of the ESSR on 15 May 1945

Total on 15 May 1945	4,896
During German occupation in Estonia	3,198
Ethnic Estonians	4,010
Members of the Communist Party	445
Former members of bourgeois organisations	573
<i>Among them:</i> 'Self-Defence'	17
'Kaitseliit' (Militia of the interwar period)	232
'Estonian Veterans' League (right wing movement)	11
<i>Political education:</i> Courses for Soviet party activists	81
Party school	40
Communist university	20
<i>Military service:</i> White Army	66
Red Guards	84
Red Army	624
Estonian Army	1,215
German Army	53

Source: Statistical overview, RGASPI f. 598, o. 1, d. 2, l. 39-41.

90. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca-London : Cornell University Press, 2001), 337-338. See also: Aadu Must, "Venemaa eestlased ja Suur Terror: Elektrooniliste allikapublikatsioonide andmete kriitiline analüüs [Russia's Estonians and the Great Terror: Critical Analysis of Data from Electronical Source Publications]," *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 3, 118 (2002): 47-84.

In the countryside, the lack of cadres was even greater. Of the 615 chairmen of village Soviets, 568 did spend the period of German occupation in Estonia. Some of them had obviously been on a similar position as village elder or secretary. The Communist party had only three members among the chairmen, while 82 were reported to be former members of bourgeois organisations and 31 had served in 'Self-Defence'. Only 12 of the chairmen were not ethnic Estonians.⁹¹ Under those circumstances, the regime had to tolerate some black spots in the lives of low-ranking officials, especially given the enormous elite losses. On the village and parish level, the situation differed enormously. In some places, all local officials were replaced, in others mostly the same administrators remained in office as previously, under German rule.

According to Soviet nationalities' policy, reliable ethnic Estonians had to be promoted, but they were in short supply, a fact calling again for some toleration. Right from the moment when the Red Army re-entered Estonia, the regime tried to win the Estonians by offering amnesties, a measure especially aimed at weakening the resistance movement. Further, the poor strata of rural society were supposed to benefit from a repetition of land reform. In addition, a certain lack of information should not be underestimated. All this led to a double standard of sorts. Many of those punished were persecuted for minor offences or were even innocent by Soviet standards. Others, especially those needed by the regime, could remain untouched.

We can identify two layers of compromise policy, at the central and local levels. The central authorities were in need of personnel; they wanted to win over the Estonians even under conditions of campaign justice.⁹² On the local level, old networks continued to function, helping relatives, friends and acquaintances of the powerful to escape persecution and find employment and a place in society.⁹³ After the war, there still existed some continuity with the prewar period in the countryside. Rural life did finally change during the process of forced collectivisation of agriculture starting in 1949.

When comparing the scale of repression, approximately 13 to 15,000 political arrests in 1944-1945, with possible groups of victims from Estonia, we become aware to what extent the regime was aiming at a compromise besides the grim cleansing. More than 50,000 Estonian veterans of German units and a larger amount of former 'Self-Defence' members were on Soviet-controlled territory after the end of the war. The special card files continued to expand. Nevertheless, nearly one third of all the people arrested in 1944-1945 were actually from active resistance.

Cleansing continued after 1945. In November 1946, during a meeting with members of the county commissions for land reform, Estonia's First Party Secretary Nikolai Karotamm raised the issue once again: "Comrades, we will identify the real

91. Quality of the cadres of chairmen of village Soviets, 1 November 1945, RGASPI, f. 598, o. 1, d. 2, ll. 124-125.

92. 'Campaign justice', term coined by Yoram Gorlizki for the different waves of persecution having a campaign character.

93. O. Mertelsmann, "The Private Sphere in Estonia during Stalinism," *Problemy istorii, filologii, kul'tury*, XVIII (2007): 61.

supporters of the Germans and there is still much work ahead. We will probably be finding German spies and nationalists during the next ten years. We have to search for them today and punish them.”⁹⁴ In August 1946, Karotamm spoke about the amnesty policy to local party organisers (*partorgs*): “A murderer is a murderer, a deserter is a deserter, but a person on guarding duty at a bridge or a haystack is something else. I want to say, on my, the party’s and the government’s behalf, that there is a directive stipulating that not a single person who comes out of the wood and is not a bandit, should be arrested. If you hear about such an incident that a person was legalised, had come out of hiding and been arrested by local authorities, please let me know, so that I may interfere and restore order.”⁹⁵ In fact, in 1954-1956, ten years after the end of the war in Estonia, 300 former German army veterans or members of ‘Self-Defence’ left the underground and legalised their existence.⁹⁶

Cleansing and purges were only one aspect of Soviet policy in Estonia. The other was a policy of compromise. Both were, of course, interconnected. Since the regime was initially weak, there existed no other possibility to win the day except for handling the Estonians like the Chechens. According to oral history, people adapted their life stories to be fit for Soviet Estonia.⁹⁷ Archival sources do not openly express the extent of the compromise policy, but it can be read between the lines. Cleansing and purges continued nonetheless until Stalin’s death. At the same time, the process of putting up with the regime was on the way. The need for show trials was felt much later.

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94. Stenographic protocol of a meeting with the county commissions for land reform, 28 November 1946, ERAF 1-4-378, 50.

95. Meeting with parish partorgs, 9-11 August 1946, ERAF 1-4-374, 73.

96. “Spravka predsedatelia KGB Estonskoi SSR I. Karlova o iavivshikhsia povinnoi i legalizovannykh grazhdanakh v 1954-1956 gg.,” Tannberg, *Politika Moskvyy...*, 337.

97. On life stories and the different personal experiences of Soviet reality see Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad: Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes* [Life Ideologies: Collective Memory and Autobiographical Interpretation of the Past in Estonians’ Life Stories] (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2005).